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Tech firms top US list of best commuter workplaces

Wed Oct 18, 2006 5:34 PM ET

By Lisa Lambert

WASHINGTON, Oct 18 (Reuters) - Technology companies on the West Coast lead other big U.S. employers in offering their workers commuter benefits, according to a list released on Wednesday by the federal government.

Computer chip maker Intel <INTC.O> tops the list of the 20 best workplaces for commuters, offering vanpools, subsidies for public transit use and rides home from its Santa Clara, California, campus in case of a family emergency.

The ranking, culled from a group of 133 companies with more than 700,000 employees, is part of a government push to eliminate the American habit of driving to work alone, which is considered a major contributor to traffic congestion and air pollution.

In 2005, 40 percent of Intel's employees worked from home using the Internet, while others cut down on commuting trips by squeezing their work hours into a short week, the report said.

Intel, which has topped the list for each of the three years it has been compiled, also offers amenities such as dry-cleaning to lessen the demand for driving, and showers and storage for those who ride bikes to work.

"It helps our employees and it helps our community at the same time," said spokeswoman Gail Dundas, adding the company has offered commuting benefits for at least a decade.

Microsoft <MSFT.O>, in Seattle, was second on the list, while Web search engine Google <GOOG.O> and software maker Oracle <ORCL.O>, both in Northern California, tied for third.

A spokeswoman from the Environmental Protection Agency, which compiled the list along with the Department of Transportation, said the nature of technology work allows companies to be flexible with employee schedules and that competition encourages them to offer innovative commuter benefits.

Only eight companies on the list were based in states not touching the Pacific Ocean.

Nike <NKE.N>, at number 17, was one of few companies from outside of the technology sector to be included. Along with providing an all-day shuttle to the nearest light rail train station, the shoe and athletic apparel maker is testing a car-sharing program at its Oregon campus.

In car sharing, drivers belong to a service that allows them to rent cars by the hour, at rates that cover insurance and gas.

Many companies offered shuttles, with Internet directory Yahoo Inc. <YHOO.O> equipping its buses for wireless Internet, and Google allowing dogs, which are also welcome at the company's offices, on board.

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